

## UW-Extension budget decreases

By Alexa Zoellner [azoellner@dailyunion.com](mailto:azoellner@dailyunion.com) | Posted: Thursday, September 22, 2016 9:31 am

JEFFERSON — The Jefferson County University of Wisconsin-Extension has a \$55,678 decrease in its proposed tax levy due to a reduction in salaries and fringe benefits, retirements and resignations.

The Jefferson County Board of Supervisors Finance Committee approved the UW-Extension proposed budget as budget hearings continued on Wednesday, advancing it to the full county board.

The Finance Committee is recommending a countywide tax levy of \$27,068,827, of which \$1,134,343 is debt. The proposed levy represents an increase over \$26,743,522 this year.

Not included in the tax levy are funds of \$838,207 for the Jefferson County Health Department and \$1,070,311 for the county library system. Including the noncountywide funds, the total tax levy is \$28,977,348.

The proposed budget, if adopted, would result in a countywide property tax rate of \$4.2969 per \$1,000 equalized valuation, translating into a 3-cent-per-\$1,000 decrease from last year.

UW-Extension's proposed 2017 budget would provide \$261,874 in tax levy. There are no proposed capital items.

"They do have a significant reduction in levy," Jefferson County Administrator Ben Wehmeier said. "The main reason is ... their 133 contract. What the 133 contract is, is it pays for the faculty. It's a 60-40 split. The state picks up 60 percent of the salaries, we (the county) pick up the remaining 40 percent. How it's developed is, the contract we get for next year is a reconciliation contract in essence, so it's the actual cost we accrued in 2016."

With the recent retirement of Community Development Educator Steve Grabow and the Jefferson County 4-H/youth agent Sarah Torbert taking another job in Wyoming, there was an approximate reduction of \$28,000 that Wehmeier said they anticipated not needing.

Grabow's position has not been filled, pending the upcoming reorganization of the UW System. The new 4-H agent is being finalized with the state.

"What we did is we removed that (\$28,000) from their budget," Wehmeier said. "That is now part of the contingency line-item budget, holding the money available until we see a transition that

makes sense from the Jefferson County point of view. We also could use (\$20,000 of) that as potentially seed money for the Farm Technology Days obligation.”

The county recently learned that Wisconsin Farm Technology Days Inc. accepted its application to host 2019 Wisconsin Farm Technology Days.

“It’s a big event, but we don’t want it to just be a three-day event,” Wehmeier said. “We want to use this as the ability to look at how you build the community, how you build volunteers, how do you re-enforce business?”

LaVern Georgson, UW-Extension agriculture agent, agreed that Farm Technology Days will be a bigger piece of Jefferson County UW-Extension’s focus moving forward.

“There’s some organizational things probably next year, that have to take place,” Georgson said. “The Executive Committee, I’m hoping, will be formed within the next two or three weeks. ... Most of the committees I expect will be fully populated or staffed by spring.

“One of (the Executive Committee’s) first responsibilities will be to do a site evaluation selection,” he continued. “The decision (on a site) really needs to be made because we’ve got to get the alfalfa seed down next spring ... Then we’d be taking a look at the county coordinator position Wisconsin Farm Technology Days is proposing and UW is proposing, as well.”

Another department with an upcoming budget item potentially related to Farm Technology Days is the Land and Water Conservation Department.

The proposed Land and Water Conservation 2017 budget provides \$255,725 in tax levy, a \$19,257 increase from the 2016 amended budget. Part of the increase is due to increases in salaries and fringes. Also, a reduction in permit fees. There are no proposed capital items.

The recommended budget was approved by the Finance Committee.

“One thing we’ve had a lot of conversations on, and it kind of ties into Farm Technology Days a little bit, but we do have the upcoming farm lease,” Wehmeier said. “The department recovers the revenue for the lease on county farmland, so that’s \$100,000 roughly in revenue for the department.”

Mark Watkins, Land and Water Conservation Department director, explained that the contract on county farmland is up at the end of next month.

Wehmeier said he and Watkins had talked about potentially using county farmland as one of the sites for 2019 Wisconsin Farm Technology Days.

“It’s not known if that would be the primary site yet,” Wehmeier said. “In the clause of the lease is the ability to extend the current lease hold by one year. We know the revenue, A, and, B, that would give us some flexibility to work with the state in determining where that site would be.

Based on the needs of the program, that might impact what the needs of the revenue streams would be and we don't want to make that decision yet until we know that that needs to be done."

Watkins said he spoke with the Land and Water Conservation Committee this morning about potentially holding the event on county farmland, but they did not yet make a decision.

"I had a conversation with the current operator (of the farm lease)," Watkins said. "He was open to the idea of an extension if that's the way we choose to go with the farm on that and also helping with cropping responsibilities to prep that area for Farm Tech Days if it ends up in that location."

Also Wednesday were budget meetings for nine other departments, including the Jefferson County Highway and Human Services departments (See related stories on A1 and in Friday's Daily Union).